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Paper Title

Why do policy fails?: evidence from the case of  
the public transport system reform of Santiago, Chile

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## INTRODUCTION

When a policy may be say to be a failure?, why do policies fail?, what lessons may provide the reform of the Chile's capital public transport system to understand why the implementation of a particular policy may end in a failure?. While policy analysis has been far concentrated on issues like formulation, implementation and evaluation, or more recently on interpretive analysis, argumentation and policy diffusion, political debates focus the view on whether a government intervention is successful or a failure. Thus, the analysis of policy failure may contribute to shorten the gap between policy analysis and political debate by generating evidence on when a policy may be considered a failure, explaining why it failed and drawing lessons from the case.

The case of analysis is the reform of the Santiago's public transport system, popularly known as "Transantiago." The implementation of this reformed system begun in Saturday, February 10, 2007, in a modality known as a "Big Bang" strategy of implementation, which meant that the previous transport system – called as "Yellow Buses" – ended operations the day before (Friday, February 9, 2007). Citizen's reaction to the quality of services received from the new transport system soon led to a very popular newspaper re-baptize as "Transchanta" (Diario La Cuarta)<sup>1</sup>, to The Economist (2008) express that "Transantiago has become a model of how not to reform public transport," and to President Bachelet to call Transantiago a "bad word" (El Mercurio 2007a).

Analysis of policy failure has paid attention to topics like crisis and catastrophes, organizational and corporate pathologies, leader activity, risk, political system overload (McConnel 2010), political struggle (Bueno de Mesquita et al 1999), disasters and calamities (Birkland 2009). Chilean analysis has mainly neglected the topic of policy failure and studies on

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<sup>1</sup> "Chanta" is slang, very commonly used in Chile, to express that something is of bad quality or that somebody do a very bad job. Then the expresion Transchanta means that the public transport system of the city of Santiago is of very bad quality.

Transantiago has focused on whether the design and implementation had enough quality information (Briones 2009), on the lack of a vision that would give priority to the users well-being (Instituto Libertad y Desarrollo 2007), on whether the business model was adequate to the complexity and size of the project (Muñoz and Gschwender 2008), on the lack of independence of specialist and incentives for them to criticize the government decisions (Morandé y Doña 2007), and on the analysis of Transantiago policy process (Olavarria 2013).

Instead, following McConnell (2010), this paper concentrates on the analysis of implementation processes, program achievements and political consequences to determine why this policy may be considered a case of failure. The paper also examines role developed by key actors, decisions task forces formation, instruments used and critical situation that would explain the results gotten by the implementation of Transantiago. Finally, the work seek to identify the policy lessons that might be drawn from the case.

The paper organizes as follows: next section presents the conceptual framework from which the case is analyzed, followed by the methodological section, the presentation of the case, discussion of the evidence and, finally, the concluding section.

## ON THE POLICY FAILURE

The concept of policy failure is closely related to that of policy success, because each one of them represents the opposite of the other. However, both are slippery concepts (Baldwin 2000, Marsh and McConnell 2009, McConnell 2010a) since “recipes for success can be misleading, the dimensions of success (and failure) are multiple, and clear cut victories or defeats are few” (Baldwin 2000: 171).

Beyond that, the analysis of a policy as a failure involves three aspects that have to be clarified: when a policy may be considered as a

failure, why the policy failed, and what type of lesson can be drawn from the failure.

Similarly to what happens with the concept of success, the idea of failure is associated to several dimensions to consider a policy as such. A common approach to assess a policy as a success is whether it achieves its goals (Boyne 2003), whether it gets “favorable or desired outcomes” (Baldwin 2000: 171) or whether it “relates to the values, aims and policies of elected governments” McConnell (2010a: 346). Baldwin (2000) adds that cost is an important dimension of the concept and states that assessing a policy as a success – or a failure – is related to how (in)effective has been the policy instrument chosen, with respect to which goals and targets, at what cost, and in comparison with what other policy instrument.

After discussing several approaches of what constitutes a policy success, McConnell (2010b: 39) delivers a definition of it, stating “a policy is successful insofar as it achieves the goals that proponents set out to achieve. However, (he claims) only those supportive of the original goals are liable to perceive, with satisfaction, an outcome of policy success.”

Thus, a policy would be seen as a failure when “it does not achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve and no longer receives support from them” (McConnell 2010b: 62), does not get favorable or desired outcomes, it opposes the values, aims and definitions of elected governments, or it is ineffective in comparison with other policy instruments. McConnell (2010b: 39) adds, “opponents are likely to perceive failure, regardless of outcomes, because they did not support the original goals.”

McConnell (2010b) presents a framework to analyze policies from success to failure, focusing on dimension such as process, programs and politics. Table 1 adapts that framework, concentrating on success and failure.

**Table N°1. Dimensions of policy success and failure: processes, programs and politics.**

<i>Processes</i>	
<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>
Preserving policy goals and instruments	Termination of government policy goals and instruments
Conferring legitimacy on the policy	Irrevocable damage to the policy legitimacy
Building a sustainable coalition	Inability to produce a sustainable coalition
Symbolizing innovation and influence	Symbolizing outmoded, insular or bizarre ideas, seemingly oblivious to how other jurisdiction are dealing with similar issues
<i>Programs</i>	
<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>
Implementation in line with objectives	Implementation fails to be executed in line with objectives
Achievement of desired outcomes	Failure to achieve desired outcomes
Meets policy domain criteria	Clear inability to meet the criteria
Creating benefit for a target group	Damaging a particular target group
<i>Politics</i>	
<i>Success</i>	<i>Failure</i>
Enhancing electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders	Damaging to the electoral prospects or reputation of governments and leaders, with no redeeming political benefit
Controlling policy agenda and easing the business of governing	Policy failing are so high and persistent on the agenda, that it is damaging government capacity to govern
Sustaining the broad values and direction of government	Irrevocably damaging to the broad values and direction of government

Source: Adapted from McConnell (2010b: 65 – 73)

According to McConnell (2010b), then, a policy is going to be characterized as a failure when it produces negative political consequences to its proponents, damage the people to whom it should improve their well-being, and when the way in which has been designed and/or implemented damage the legitimacy of its proponents or the supporting coalition.

On the other hand, taking a managerial perspective and based in his experience as English Head of the Delivery Unit, Barber (2007) helps to understand why a policy may succeed or fail. He argues that a policy implementation may succeed when it involves the integration of delivery, spending and efficiency. Then, a policy would end in a failure when it lacks one of these components or lacks of integration among them.

Analyzing the case of Hurricane Katrina, Birkland and Waterman (2008) takes a perspective of the policy process to understand why a policy may fail. They claim that, in this case, the policy failure would have been produced by “the inability of federal, state, and local government to take the appropriate steps to mitigate, prepare for, and respond to Hurricane

Katrina.” Beyond the context of that case, this definition point out that a policy failure is also a consequence of the lack of capacity of government to anticipate, prepare for and react to situations that negatively affect the well-being of citizens.

On the lessons that can be drawn from a policy failure, May (1992) identifies three types of learning: instrumental policy learning, social policy learning and political learning. Although policy learning is not exclusively gotten from policy failures, this gives opportunities for learning based on trial and error. Instrumental learning is related to “lessons about the viability of policy instruments or implementation designs;” social learning “entails lessons from the social construction of policy problems, the scope of policy, or policy goals;” while “political learning is concerned with lessons about maneuvering within and manipulation of policy processes in order to advance an idea or problem” (May 1992: 350 – 351).

Thus, a broad understanding on a particular case of policy failures has to consider, at least, aspects covered in this short conceptual revision. That is what this article intends to do.

## METHODS AND DATA

This is an explanatory case study that analyzes the implementation of the urban transport system reform of the city of Santiago, Chile. The word case refers to “experiences in which events involve interventions that may lead to changes in a policy” (Barzelay et al 2003: 23). The analysis is aimed to realize why that particular policy has been considered as a failure, what key situations and circumstances of the implementation process lead to generate the policy failure, how they contributed to the policy failure and what policy lessons can be drawn from that experience. According to Yin (1994: 1) the case study is the preferred strategy when the researcher has little control over the events and when the research concentrates on a contemporary phenomenon of real life. In turn, the explanatory case study allows one to identify the best explanation – among

several – on a set of events, which later can be applied to similar situations within the same phenomenon (Yin 1994: 5).

The unit of analysis is the implementation process of the urban transport system called “Transantiago.” Data comes from four sources: interviews, official documents, academic bibliography and the media.

Fifty-three interviews were conducted in an effort to get an integral view of the Transantiago implementation. Interviewees were high-level public officials, congressmen, Transantiago Coordinators, high-level advisors, experts, scholars, and top managers and professional staff of private companies working for Transantiago (Banks and Bus Companies) (table 2). They were primarily selected from public information available on the web. Snowballing method was also applied to identify interviewees. Interviewees were selected according to criteria of theoretical sampling and theoretical redundancy, which permitted the collection of testimonies and information leading to identifying relevant analytical categories and to avoiding already known information or that without analytical value (Valles 2007). Interviews were analyzed through the application of the grounded theory method and software for qualitative analysis. Interviews were taking from 2010 to 2013, depending on availability of interviewees.

**Table 2. Distribution of interviewees on the implementation of Transantiago**

<i>Type of Interviewee</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Ministers	10
Undersecretaries	4
Intendentes and Mayors	4
Transantiago Coordinators	4
Advisors	14
Experts and Scholars	4
Congressmen	7
Private Sector Representatives	4
TOTAL	53

Source: Author's records

Interviews were conducted as conversations covering topics such as strategies followed to put in practice the reform, concepts and objectives

guiding the implementation, fostering factors and obstacles faced, main characteristics of the process, main actors and their roles, main decisions made, what those in charge of the policy did to implement them, how they saw the citizen's reaction and what they did to face the problems.

The analysis of official documents focused on identifying government goals, decisions and instructions delivered by authorities, designs of the policy and implementation process, roles played by key actors, feedback that government got from the implementation and its reaction to problems that were going on. The revision of academic literature expert's analysis was aimed at identifying key aspects that may have led to the failure and options discussed to improve the functioning of Transantiago. The media (newspaper and TV news shows in youtube) was revised with the purpose of characterizing citizen's reaction to the implementation of Transantiago, actions undertaken for those in charge of the transport reform, public speeches, interviews to authorities in the media, and the political debate that arose consequently.

## IMPLEMENTING TRANSANTIAGO

Why Transantiago may be considered a policy failure? Following McConnell (2010), the analysis focuses on consequences of implementation of processes and programs as well as political effects on government.

A critical point in the Transantiago process was the public tender that took place in December 2004, which assigned the contracts to private companies and established a minimum of 4,200 buses for the operation of the new system. A previous public tender, which called for proposals considering a minimum of 5,200 buses at a fixed price of 380<sup>2</sup> Chilean pesos, had to be declared desert (desierta) because companies estimated that they would lose money with those conditions of operation. Because of

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<sup>2</sup> By February 10th, 380 Chilean pesos is equivalent to 0,69 US dollars

that government decided to reduce the number of buses needed to operate the system to 4,635 (Chamber of Deputies 2007: 170) and the contracts were signed considering that number. However, according the testimony of the Undersecretary of Transport by the time of the beginning of operation of Transantiago “the system initially counted with 2,236 buses and on Saturday, February the 10th – the day that Transantiago started operations – there were 1,700 buses” operating in streets (Chamber of Deputies 2007: 570).

The way in which Transantiago started has been seen as a highly controversial decision. The starting of Transantiago meant a radical and abrupt departure from the system in place until February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007, given that the following day only Transantiago operated in the streets of Santiago. That was called a “Big Bang” starting of operations, “since one day we had one network of buses’ routes and the following day we have a completely different one” (interview to a congressman). An ex Minister adds, the “Big Bang decision was a thing that it could not be explained ... and that was a great difficulty”.

An Undersecretary explain that government choose an implementation of type “Big Bang, even knowing that there were a lot of things that were not functioning, because it was a manner to cut with the past, to cut with the of association of bus owners of the previous system, who boycotted the new transport plan of Santiago; then, having done gradually, it would have meant to do Transantiago with them in a period of four, five or six year or perhaps never because we permanently had the menace of boycott.”

On the other hand, regarding the technical criteria on which Transantiago was implemented an expert on public transport expresses “we were very worried because we saw that the system was going in the wrong direction because the basic requirements of a transport system based on a structure of trunk and feeding services were not being fulfilled, such as infrastructure, a reduction of commuting time in trunk lines to

compensate the additional time of transfer from one bus to the next.” A Mayor of a highly populated city points out “there was not a fleet management software.” A top manager of a bus company states “the fare payment system, through a touchless smart card, was not ready by the beginning of operations and because of that we were paid for referential demand.” Another expert adds “since the fare payment system was not working when Transantiago started, the first week of operation was free of charge and that generated a perception among users that it was not necessary to pay because the service was bad.”

The central objective of Transantiago was to modernize the transport system of the capital of Chile, with special emphasis in improving the quality of services to users, offering an efficient system, economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, and increasing the use of public transport (Promis 2007; Malbrán 2006). Environmental sustainability implied to achieve a reduction in air and acoustic pollution of the city, and, on the other hand, “economic and social sustainability meant that Transantiago would have to be subsidy-free and charge an average fare similar to that of the previous system” (Muñoz and Gschwender 2008: 46).

Polls expressed that Transantiago has had improvements but also showed that it never got a good evaluation from the majority of citizens: CEP survey, from June and December 2007, showed that 77% of respondents evaluated badly the new transport system (CEP 2007); GFK-Adimark (2015) poll, from December 2007 and 2008, showed that 13% and 19% of respondents respectively approved the functioning of Transantiago; that approval increased to 40% by the first semester of 2010 – the best evaluation ever – (Beltrán and Palma 2012), and by February 2015, 76% of the citizens disprove how Bachelet administration was managing Transantiago (GFK-Admimark 2015).

Implementation of Transantiago has had damaging effects on the welfare on the users of the Chile’s capital public transport system. Beltrán and Palma (2012) showed that the worsening in the citizen’s evaluation is

associated to the increasing of the fare, a greater time of commuting and waiting in bus stops, and the worsening in compliance indicators, which, in turn, are related to a lower level of control. A study by Bravo and Martinez (2008: 10) reveals that users of Transantiago have experienced “job loss by a household member, changes in working hours, increases in the days worked ... (and that there is) evidence, albeit weaker, of an increase in the working day.”

Fare evasion was not a concern in the original design, however as operational deficit raised this became as one of the main problems in the functioning of Transantiago. For instance, by August 2007, few months after the beginning of implementation, the monthly difference between revenues and cost was US\$35 million (dollars) and because of that Congress approved US\$290 million (dollars) to cover the deficit (Chile’s Chamber of Deputies 2007: 687). According to the report of the Chile’s Chamber of Deputies (2007: 725), fare evasion was the main problem in the deficit of Transantiago. By March 2014, 23,5% of users of Transantiago evaded to pay the fare (La Tercera 2014). The 2013 deficit of Transantiago was US\$649.7 millions (dollars), US\$33 millions more than the previous year (El Mercurio 2014). On September 2013 Congress approved a permanent annual subsidy for Transantiago of US\$1,450 million until the year 2022, going a half of that to the transport system of other regions of Chile (Radio Cooperativa 2013). By February 2015, the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications was studying to increase the subsidy to Transantiago (El Mercurio 2015). Being a highly controversial issue, according to Muñoz and Gschwender (2008: 52) “the debate over subsidization must be linked to a definition of the quality of service Transantiago is expected to provide.”

The effect of Transantiago on pollution has been an arguable topic. Muñoz and Gschwender (2008: 50) state that although after the beginning of Transantiago implementation a reduction in noise was perceived, air pollution in 2007 was higher than previous year which might have been

associated to a natural gas shortage that forced many companies and electricity generators to shift to diesel or coal. Figueroa et al (2011) conclude that there was a reduction of  $3.9 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  in atmospheric concentration of MP10 in the city of Santiago from 2007 to 2010, which is coincident with the implementation of Transantiago. Another study shows an increase in oxide of nitrogen ( $\text{NO}_x$ ) of 9% in 2010 with respect to 2007 in Alameda (the main street of Santiago), an area with newer type of buses; and higher levels of concentration of elemental carbon and a stabilization of levels of MP ultrafine in La Cisterna, an area with older buses and trucks (Centro Mario Molina Chile 2010). In turn, Gallego et al (2013: 48) argue that after seven months of implementation of Transantiago CO at “city level increased 27%, ... (which would be) a combination of more cars (from households of different income levels) and more congestion.”

Government advertised the new system on TV, radio and newspapers as a big and highly positive change in the way citizens would transport within the city.<sup>3</sup> However, what people experienced since the first day of operation was exactly the opposite. The beginning of operations of Transantiago was chaotic, an insufficient quantity of buses was running in the streets, there was lack of information about the routes of buses, protest rose spontaneously and the media profusely reported what was going on since that first day. On this, an Undersecretary interviewed explains that “there was not any pilot plan, everything was launched in just one day, there were not posters on buses about their routes, users did not know the new routes, drivers had not been trained and users had to go showing the drivers what routes they might follow.”

Spontaneous protest and riots against the functioning of Transantiago soon started, which was extensively covered by the media,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See on youtube “Transantiago: The Promise” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wpiHN9axt4>);

<sup>4</sup> Media coverage on the implementation of Transantiago may be seen in the following videos on youtube: “Transantiago: Citizen Stress” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZq2SdxYAcS>); Transantiago: Scandal part 1 and part 2

and a political crisis rose as a consequence of the situation. The Minister of Transport and Telecommunication had to resign 45 days after the start of Transantiago, President Bachelet admitted that “things have not been well done (El Mercurio 2007b), (that) inhabitants of Santiago deserved apologies” (from Bachelet and her administration);<sup>5</sup> and former president Lagos blamed that problems were mainly about implementation (during Bachelet administration),<sup>6</sup> acknowledged errors in design and later expressed public apologies<sup>7</sup> since Transantiago was designed in his administration. The final report of the Investigating Committee of the Chamber of Deputies on Transantiago (2007: 699 – 671) criticized both Presidents Lagos and Bachelet for “launching a policy that has constituted a disaster with no precedent in the country history, with extremely serious social consequences as well as with administrative and financial responsibilities whose effects on Chilean people will last for a long time”, in the case of President Lagos, and to President Bachelet for “having to do it, not to avoid starting implementation on February 10, 2007.”

Since Transantiago was thought as self financed endeavor but given that bus companies revenues were based on referential demand and the number of buses departing from terminals, the very little control of authorities about whether buses were really covering the whole routes, and fare evasion by users, the system soon fell in an increasing deficit. That situation made necessary transfers from the public coffer to maintain the service but government had no legal support that enable it to do such transfer.

In the budget bill for years 2008 and 2009 government included an

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(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjxTGuIQFh0>),(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tarcB8c-9GU>)

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjxTGuIQFh0&spfreload=10> She defended herself saying that she had no information on problems about the readiness of Transantiago and that her instinct told her to suspend it. On this, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjxTGuIQFh0> (minute 4:55).

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSP-0gldiKg>

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol4uuxM8xSI>

item to finance Transantiago but the Congress rejected it and only approved 1.000 Chilean pesos to it (around two US dollars) (El Mercurio 2007d; La Nación 2007a and 2008). To face that difficult situation government transferred US\$80 million from Metro but the President of Metro opposed to that solution and stepped down (El Mercurio 2007c), and a dictum from the General Comptroller of the Republic declared illegal the transfer (La Nacion 2007b). Government intended another solution: a loan of US\$10 million from State Bank to finance the first four month of operations of 2008 and additional loan of US\$400 million from the Inter-American Development Bank to finance Transantiago but the Constitutional Tribunal declared both loans unconstitutional (La Tercera 2008). The only left over solution was to made use of a constitutional provision that habilitate the President to spend an additional 2% of the public budget to face calamities affecting the nation, which was approved by the General Comptroller of the Republic (Ercilla 2008). For the long run the solution was to send a bill to Congress for a permanent public subsidy to Transantiago, which was finally approved in September 2013, in President Piñera administration, at a cost of US\$1450 million per year (Cooperativa.cl 2013) and US\$16000 millions between 2012 and 2022 (La Tercera 2012).

The approval of only 1000 Chilean pesos for Transantiago let see not only a tough political battle in Congress but also a serious crisis within governmental coalition. Between 2006 and 2010 Concertacion – the governmental coalition – has 64 of a total of 120 Deputies (BCN 2015) and 20 out of 38 Senators (La Tercera 2009), being the majoritarian political force in Congress. The approval of only 1000 Chilean pesos for Transantiago counted with the votes from opposition parties and six Christian Democratic deputies belonging to Concertación. In the Senate that proposal was approved with the 17 votes from the opposition plus 2 votes from Concertación Senators and one from the independent Senator. A tough political conflict rose in the Christian Democratic Party: the

Senator that vote for the 1000 pesos for Transantiago bill was expelled and five Deputies resigned to the party in solidarity with him (La Nación 2007c). The episode meant that Concertacion lost its majority in Congress.

Transantiago was a key issue in the 2009 presidential election (see Cooperativa.cl 2009 and 2007). Taking advantage of polls, which showed a rate of citizens' approval between 11 and 18%, opposition blamed Concertacion administration for the launching of Transantiago. The election was won by the opposition candidate, Sebastian Piñera, who took office on March 11, 2010.

Why did this happen? Or, more precisely, what situations, circumstances and actions led Transantiago to fail? According to the Chamber of Deputies (2007: 675 – 677) the failure of Transantiago is a consequence of errors in both the design and implementation, a massive non-fulfilment from those that had to guaranty the operation of the new system, a lack of capacity to control and supervision, a lack of the most basic elements for its functioning, such as a transport metropolitan authority, institutional coordination, minimum infrastructure, technological support, the totality of buses and a positive disposition of bus companies operating the system.

Although the report of the Investigation Committee of the Chamber of Deputies identifies areas of failures, the key question is what may explain failures in all of these areas. According to the collected evidence, four main issues may offer the keys to understand why this happens.

First, relationship between the promoters of Transantiago and the association of bus owners of the old transport system was tense and conflictive. This association had made a strike and lockout in the intersection of two important avenues in Santiago, on August 12 and 13, 2003, generating a massive traffic jam and an enormous scarcity of public transport (El Mercurio 2003; La Cuarta 2002). In addition, this association had an important political influence, since it made a “significant contribution to political campaigns” of Congressmen of West Santiago

(interview to a member of the Committee of Ministers of Santiago's Urban Transport). Another interviewee explains "there was a tremendous collusion; ... these congressmen always defended bus owners, despite the bad service they gave."

To avoid delays and influences that might severely alter the nature of the reform, Transantiago designers chose to use the presidential administrative capacity instead of sending a bill to Congress. A member of the Committee of Ministers of Santiago's Urban Transport points out "there was an explicit decision not to send it to Congress and work it using presidential orders, because if we had done that, given the collusion between the association of bus owners and some congressmen, it had not been ready in President Lagos period, if ever, considering the big transformation that the reform meant."

The association of bus owners of the previous transport system was seen as an obstructionist of the new Santiago's transport plan and because of that the Transantiago designers saw the "Big Bang" strategy of implementation as a "way to cut with the past, with the association of bus owners ... (because) if we had done it with the association we had spent 4, 5 or 6 year due to the people the association had ... we had the menace of boycott" (interview to an ex Undersecretary).

Second, Transantiago was designed in President Lagos administration and implemented during administration of President Bachelet. President Lagos was highly motivated for this reform and because of that "the presidential impulse was extremely important" (interview to a Deputy). An ex Minister points out "he wanted to do it, as President he wanted to fulfill Transantiago in his period." A member of the Committee of Ministers of Santiago's Urban Transport explains, "when there was a problem the President himself got involved, called Ministers and the problem got faced." The involvement of President Lagos in the design of Transantiago is clearly expressed in the following testimony: "I was invited to a seminar in La Moneda (the Presidential Palace), the

Ministers of Transport, the Coordinator of Transantiago, the Chief of Staff of the President were there, plus three very important presidential advisors and I was very surprised to see that the speaker was President Lagos himself. There was a certain consensus about the need to fix public transport and how it had to be done, and the one explaining everything was President Lagos himself.”

President Bachelet instead delegated all matters related to Transantiago in her Minister of Transport. For her, Transantiago “was not a priority, it was a thing that she inherited from Lagos administration” (interview to an ex Undersecretary). An expert of the Ministry team adds, “the (first) Minister (of Transport in Bachelet administration) told us in meetings that he had no capacity to understand the magnitude of the problem he had to face.”

Third, the institutional design and the constitution of the team in charge of Transantiago showed to be inappropriate for the magnitude of the policy intervention. The basic institution of Transantiago was the Committee of Ministers of Santiago’s Urban Transport Plan,<sup>8</sup> which lack specification about its legal capacities and how public agencies integrating the Committee. On this a member of the Committee explains “it was a Committee that made decisions on matters for which it had no jurisdiction and, consequently, neither administrative nor political responsibility.” Furthermore, the Presidential order that creates the Committee did not clarify the role that each member had to fulfill in it, which soon made arise

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<sup>8</sup> The Committee was composed of the Minister of Public Works and Transport and Telecommunications, the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism and National Properties, and as permanent invitees the Undersecretary of Transport, the Intendente of Santiago, the Director of the National Commission of Environment, the General Coordinator of Concesiones of the Ministry of Public Works, the Executive Secretary of SECTRA and the President of Metro (Chile’s Presidency 2003). By the time of the creation of the Committee the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunication as well as the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism and the Ministry of National Properties were headed by two Bi-Ministries respectively. Later, the management of those ministries returned to normality, being all headed by only one minister.

conflicts within the Committee. Another member of the Committee points out “ ... in this informality the Coordinator of Transantiago understood that he was the authority of the public transport of Santiago but the Minister understood that he was the responsible for the Committee (and for Transantiago) and that was a permanent conflict.” Another conflict was between the Coordinator of Transantiago and the President of Metro because in the view of the Coordinator of Transantiago, “the reform consisted in creating an integrated public transport system, in which Metro was one component (and buses were the other) but that implied that Metro lost autonomy” (interview to a member of the Committee of Ministers of Santiago’s Urban Transport Plan).

On the other hand, the configuration of the working team that undertook both the design and implementation of the Santiago’s urban transport reform as well as the continuous changes it had, appeared to have had serious negative consequences on the transport services received by users. At the beginning “the team was composed of 10 people and, by the time of implementation it became to be integrated by 40 people, which was insufficient for the work load that was demanded by the initiative (designing and implementing a new transport system of a city of 6 million inhabitants and 4 million of daily rides)” (interview of a Transantiago working team member). An Undersecretary adds, “by 2014 the team had 140 people and scarcely might do the job.”

Furthermore, besides its small number, the working team was affected by continuous changes in professional members and authorities. A member of the working team adds “those who worked on (the design of) contracts were gone, few stayed for the implementation stage; then the incoming people wanted to put Transantiago in the street, stage one, and later they were gone.” An ex advisor points out “there was much discontinuity in the professional team, several ministers and much instability.” Between 2002 and 2007 there were five ministers of transports

and telecommunications, three undersecretaries of transports, seven Coordinators of Transantiago and four Intendentes of Santiago.

Fourth, although contracts may be seen as a byproduct of the weakness of the institutional design and the working team, they are also said very often to be a key element to understand the consequences of the implementation of Transantiago. According to the ex Minister of Transport Cortázar, the incentives were wrongly allocated because there was “a payment based on referential demand, in other words, a fix payment. Each bus company received a fix payment, independently of how many passengers it transported or how many buses it put on the street. It is natural that if a company has a fix payment, every time it put a bus on the street its cost increases and its revenues decreases, then the incentives were allocated on the side that buses were not on the street instead of being on the other way around” (Chamber of Deputies 2007: 82). An ex Undersecretary points out “those who wrote the contracts for public tenders of highways also wrote the contracts for Transantiago and applied the same framework, they were mirror contracts, because for these lawyers both things were very similar but from the social and engineering perspective (highways and Transantiago) were totally different.” A member of the working team adds “for those who wrote the terms of the public tender and contracts, the measure of success was not in the functioning of the system but in having bidders for the public tender and that was achieved.”

Contracts were also a key element in determining the date in which operation of Transantiago should start. As long as the starting date approached and reports showed that the system was not ready some within the government considered the option of postponement but it was soon discarded because of the contract provisions. An ex Minister explain “the Minister of the Interior asked me ‘the Minister of Transport says that everything is ready but I have the impression that it is not, what do you think?’ and I told him ... be known that you asked me, it going to be a

disaster, that is my answer.” A major player of the facts state “the reason for not postpone it was mainly economical because we had contracts signed and if we did not start on February 10 (2007) we had to pay the bus companies lost profit ... but we did neither have an item in the budget nor a law authorizing us to do that. To do it, we would have had to send a bill to Congress but how we could have send a bill asking Congress to approved a bill to pay for a service that we did not receive. So, the evaluation was that to do that would have been more catastrophic”. Mr. Jaime Estévez, a Minister of Transport during Lagos administration, declared before the Investigating Committee of the Chamber of Deputies (2007: 707) “to postpone beyond February 10 it would have cost the country, at least, one million dollar per every day of postponement due to lost profit.”

What type of policy lessons can be drawn from the experience of Transantiago implementation? On this, Correa (2010: 134), an ex Minister of Transport (1990-1992) and ex Coordinator of Transantiago (2004-2005), explains that it is necessary “to understand the indissoluble systemic relationship between city and transport, while understanding that each of these components is a system itself.” Muñoz and Gschwender (2008: 52-53), two scholars, engineers of transport, and technical advisors of Transantiago, point out that “authorities should have communicated clearly and accurately the advantages of the new system, ... (that) government should clearly have been more receptive to user feedback and previous operator’s experience, ... (that) Transantiago was designed with very limited human capacity, ... (that) a proper bus infrastructure is essential, ... (that) the lack of continuity resulting from the absence of a single political figure negatively affected the teams of experts working on the project, ... (that Transantiago) must be subsidized, ... (that) the Big Bang implementation of services and fares involved a great risk and proved to be very costly, ... (and that) the implementation an integrated system

that has been designed as such can not be inaugurated if some of its key elements are absent.”

In turn, an ex Minister of Transport interviewed points out “the process had to be incremental, because there were not the elements (for it be an implementation of ‘Big Bang’ type).” A Deputy interviewed mentions “it should have started with some pilot plans and a certain level of gradualism ... (and also) later it got the evidence about the need of coordination among ministries and other players with responsibilities in the plan.” A member of the working team expresses “for a project of this magnitude, it is very important to have the technology opportunely.”

On the other hand, in their declaration before the Investigating Committee of the Chamber of Deputies (2007) expressed what follows. Javier Etcheberry, an ex Minister of Transport in President Lagos administration, exposed that “it is necessary to have more capable people and to count with more resources for so complex issues (p.221).” For Sonia Tschorne, an ex Minister of Housing and Urbanism, one of the learned lessons is the “failure of the execution” (p.272). For Eduardo Bitrán, an ex Minister of Public Works during the implementation of Transantiago, an important lesson learned was the need to give “great priority to investment.”

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of Transantiago, as a case of policy failure, allows contrasting conceptual analysis from the specialized policy literature on policy failure with a real case. The evidence presented shows that while that existing theoretical works addressing what constitute a policy failure offer a consisting guide to analyze concrete situations, there is a lack of conceptualization to analyze what causes a policy failure and more precision is needed to identify policy lessons.

McConnel’s (2010b) framework to analyze policy success also offers the possibility to analyze policy failure. According to it, Transantiago may

be seen as a failure in the three dimensions identified in that framework. From the process perspective, Transantiago generated an irrevocable damage to the policy legitimacy at the point that President Bachelet had to acknowledge that it is a “bad word” (El Mercurio 2007a), the La Cuarta newspaper re-baptize it as “Transchanta” and “The Economist” (2008) put it as a “model of how not to reform a public transport.” Furthermore, although technocrats and authorities involved in its design and in the first stage of operation have justified the decision of a “Big Bang” implementation, according to the facts and results gotten this appear to be a bizarre idea since the elements needed to put into practice that type of decision were not ready or were simply absent. Other big Chilean reform, like that of criminal justice reform, was implemented gradually allowing testing it against reality and making changes and adjustment accordingly. Despite the policy has not been terminated and its main objectives – to modernize the transport system – as well as basic instruments, such as to get an integrated transport system, have remained, the policy itself has been subject of very important changes: from being thought a self financed service it became a subsidized system; network of routes have been changed, approaching to that of the previous system, number of buses have increased notoriously; contracts have been changed putting the incentives for buses transport passengers, instead of being in the terminals – as it was at the beginning – and giving the Ministry of Transport greater capacities to control operations of bus companies; the size of the team supervising Transantiago in the Ministry of transport has increased almost four times, among other important changes.

From the program point of view, Transantiago generated a severe damage in the welfare of users, which very soon led to the emergence of protest and riots. Given that, Metro became overloaded and the use of cars increased. Then, the purpose of improving the quality of service to users and getting an efficient and self-sustainable system was has not been achieved. Furthermore, the implementation of an integrated transport

system requires the availability of the basic infrastructure, the technology of fleet management and fare charge, which were not ready by the time when Transantiago started operations.

From the political perspective, Transantiago generated a big crisis for the Bachelet administration and its supporting coalition: as it was shown in the previous section, several congressmen abandoned the Concertacion, the governmental coalition lost its majority in Congress, and in the next presidential election lost against the opposition candidate. It is recurrently said that one of the key reasons for that lost is the failure of Transantiago.

Analyses of reasons and/or circumstances that may lead a policy intervention to fail have been less consistent. Following Barber (2007), from the managerial perspective, it may be said that the lack of integration among delivery, spending and efficiency and/or the lack of one of these element might generate a policy failure. Following Birkland and Waterman (2008), from the policy process point of view, the failure may be the consequence of the absence or deficiencies in government activity in terms of anticipation, mitigation and response to a particular event that negatively affects the welfare of population.

Although these contributions help to get a broad understanding of what variables may be associated to a policy failure, the identification of more specifics domains or areas of search seems to be necessary. The analysis of the case of Transantiago may offer some clues to illuminate this search.

The analysis of Transantiago shows that size of intervention has to be in correspondence to the size of the problem to be faced; otherwise, far from being successful, the intervention will end in a failure. Size of intervention refers to resources allocated to the policy, clear identification of areas of government involved with a specification of their duties, and the programming of time in which, at least, the initial stages of the intervention will be carried out.

4,635 buses specified in the public tender and the contracts signed to put in practice Transantiago – without even mentioning the 1,700 buses actually operating that Saturday 10 of February 2007 – showed to be clearly insufficient for a city of six million people and 4 millions daily trips. Due to the situation created, the Transantiago fleet augmented to 5,600 buses few days after the beginning of operations but the Minister Cortázar – the one that took the position on March 27, 2007 – declared before the Investigating Committee that the Santiago’s transport system required 6,400 buses (Chamber of Deputies 2007: 170 – 171). Similarly, 40 professionals working on the design and at the beginning of implementation of Transantiago were clearly insufficient, at the point that by 2014 140 people were managing the system and that was considered the minimum team size required (interview to an ex Undersecretary).

Furthermore, though participants in the Committee of Ministers for the Urban Transport of Santiago were clearly identified in Presidential Order of April 27, 2003, they did not acted coordinately and integrally but just limited to act in terms of the duties and goals of the public institution they headed and to defend the their corporate agendas (Chamber of Deputies 2007: 689). This behavior prevented Transantiago to have a broad task force within government acting integrally for the success of the policy; getting instead a diminished and weak effort of concerned public organizations, which did not correspond to what was needed in relation to the size of the problem that had to be faced.

The allocation of time to this intervention also showed to be insufficient. Regarding this, the Investigative Committee of the Chamber of Deputies (2007: 690) concludes, “ chronograms of Plans, specially of those of big size need to consider greater roominess of time due to countless imponderables” that may happen.

On the other hand, the institutional design also showed to be inappropriate for the type of intervention that had to be undertaken. Two aspects seem to be determinant in the results gotten: distribution of

competences among the public organizations participating in Transantiago and integration of their efforts as well as the writing of terms of the public tender and contracts that regulated operations of bus companies. Due to the unclear distribution of roles, strong conflicts soon raised within the Committee in charge of the intervention. In addition to that, the lack of specification of roles and how they integrated in the common task led members of the Committee of Ministers to concentrate in the area of work of institutions they headed. Conclusions of the Investigative Committee (2007: 690) severely criticized them stating “that was the common attitude: to concentrate in their own task and not to worry for the collective task assigned by the President.”

Furthermore, the lack of a Santiago’s authority of transport was seen as an important factor contributing to the failure: on this, Germán Correa, the first Coordinator of Transantiago, exposed before the Investigative Committee of the Chamber of Deputies (2007: 688) “I was said to be the Zar of Transantiago but I only had the title of Zar because I neither had the faculties and competences nor administrative and political autonomy to make decisions.”

Moreover, norms that regulated the behavior of bus companies also proven to be determinants in the results gotten. The main goal of the public tender was to get bidders instead of having a real concern in the functioning of the system, as explained by one of the team member interviewed. Similarly, contracts had incentives for bus companies not to be in the streets instead of being transporting passengers, as it was expressed by the ex Minister of Transport Cortázar before the Chamber of Deputies (2007: 82).

Readiness appears to be a third set of key variables associated with the failure of Transantiago. The “Big Bang” strategy of implementation of an integrated transport system required that all of its components be ready by the time when operations had to start, that is infrastructure, the fleet management software, the fare payment system, the touchless smart

card in hands of users, an adequate number of buses, the new network of bus' routes being known by users, the structure of trunk and feeding service tested and proven to be functioning according to goals, criteria and fine design of the intervention, and an adequate financing structure. According to the evidence collected in this work, most of these elements, if not all, were not ready by Saturday 10 of February 2007.

Finally, what the evidence also suggests, regarding the complexity of implementation of initiatives like Transantiago, is the need of a stable commitment of key political leaders. President Lagos was highly motivated for the reform of the urban transport system, strongly supported it, and intervened actively to solve problems any time it was required, according to the testimony of interviewees. For President Bachelet, Transantiago was a program she inherited and consequently it was not a priority for her. She delegated it in a sectorial Minister who acknowledged before his team "he had no capacity to understand the magnitude of the problem he had to face" (interview to a member of the team working on Transantiago).

Following May (1992), instrumental, social and political lessons may be drawn from this case. Instrumental lessons left by the experience of Transantiago are those related to the need to correct, or at least not to repeat, implementation designs associated to the policy failure. These mainly refer to the need to assure that the size of intervention corresponds to the size of the problem, that the institutional design is appropriate for the intended policy, and that all elements identified in the design have to be ready by the time of the beginning of implementation.

On the other hand, one main lesson left by this case refers to the relation between users and government. Although technical analyses showed the bad quality of services given by the system of "yellow buses," that was never shown as a main public problem by the polls. Thus, the reform of Santiago's transport system was not a citizen's claim. Transantiago neither was a main issue in presidential platform of the then candidate Lagos. It became a priority policy once Lagos administration

realized that other priority projects might not be implemented due to the lack of financing as a consequence of the Asian economic crisis (Olavarría 2013).

Beyond expert analyses, for users it was not clear why the Santiago's transport system based in the "yellow buses" had to be so radically changed and that impression was stressed immediately after February 10, 2007. Users were accustomed to the "yellow buses" network of routes – which covered any place in the city and were flexible to adapt to a new demand –, waited an average of 4 minutes to take a bus and had to do a very low number of transshipment in their trips (Briones 2009). Furthermore, routes covered by Transantiago were not known by users and took a long time for them to get used to the new system. This, together with the shortage of buses, detonated riots and protest by users, who felt cruelly mistreated by government. TV news shows covered these events and what people felt: one person express "thank you Mrs. President for taking care of us", another says "(the government) is laughing of people" and another person ask the journalist "why (the government) does this to us"?.<sup>9</sup>

Then the lesson, from the social point of view, aims to the need of a correspondence between people's perceptions and feelings about needs and problematic situation they are facing, on the one hand, and how policy interventions may satisfy that. In this case, government failed to connect the need of an urban transport system reform with people's perception of problem on it, to generate a better quality transport system, and to provide users information about the new system for them to feel that the change went in their best interest.

Social learning gotten from this case also leads to identify political lessons. One main political lesson refers to the need to connect intends of reforms with people perception of needs. This means that reforms need a

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<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjxTGuIQFh0>

basic legitimacy and that make necessary that citizens may perceive that the change – proposed or in course – will bring the satisfaction of their best interest.

This lesson leads to another one: reforms like Transantiago need and extended political agreement, which makes necessary to engage in an extended dialogue among political forces that give a sustained political support to the reform. In turn, political support needs to consider and/or connect with people's perception of problem and whether the reform would improve citizen's welfare because, otherwise, the support might not be sustainable. Thus, a failure in doing this political route may end in a big political crisis for the proponents of the reform.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of the Transantiago case has shown that the analysis of policy failure needs to produce a broad understanding of a situation that it is to be a policy failure. That means to answer three type of interrelated questions: when a policy may be said to be a failure, why did it failed and what lessons may drawn from that experience.

Similarly, the analysis has let see that the McConnell (2010) framework is useful to identify when a policy may be said to be a failure. The three dimensions included in that framework – processes, programs and politics – reasonable identify analytical clues to understand whether a government intervention has become a policy failure.

However, it does not happen the same with the conceptual elements we have so far to answer the question of why do policies fail. Although contributions of Barber (2007) and Birkland and Waterman (2008) offers clues from the managerial and the policy process perspective, our understanding is still weak to have a proper response to the above question. This work suggests that a likely framework to identify causes of policy failure should inquire on whether there is correspondence between the size of the problem and the size of the intervention, whether the

institutional design of the policy distribute competences allowing to manage the policy effectively and foster behavior of participants in direction to the policy goals, whether there have been constancy that all key elements of the policy are ready to start the implementation stage, and whether commitments of key political leaders of the policy are or have been stable.

May (1992) framework also appears reasonable to identify policy lessons from a particular case. Perhaps the most important lesson left by Transantiago is that politician's desires of policy intervention or reforms should be connected with citizen's perception of problems and understanding that the policy will generate a better welfare for them. After all, democracy is about the people's will.

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